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ABSTRACT

The reading and literature objectives for the 1979-80 assessment by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are categorized into four major areas: valves reading and literature, comprehends written works, responds to written works, and applies study skills in reading. These major objectives and their subobjectives are presented as statements followed by amplified descriptions. Following each subobjective are a few italicized questions illustrating the kinds of questions one might ask or the kinds of skills one might expect students to display. (RL)

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# *READING AND LITERATURE OBJECTIVES*

## *1979-80 Assessment*

No. 11-RL-10

by the
National Assessment of Educational Progress

Education Commission of the States
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## INTRODUCTION

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has previously published two sets of reading objectives (1970 and 1974) and two sets of literature objectives (1970 and 1975). This publication marks the first time that the two areas have been combined. Both areas will be assessed in a joint reading/literature assessment during the 1979–80 school year.

Over the years, the teaching of reading and literature has differed in important ways. Professionals in each subject area have usually been trained quite differently and have tended to take responsibility for teaching children at different ages. Reading teachers have seen themselves as the trainers of the young, inexperienced student. Literature teachers have usually assumed that their students already know how to read and that their task is to expose students to particular literary works and teach them the skills for reading such works. Some literature teachers have seen themselves as teachers of an art, whereas many reading teachers have seen themselves as teachers of a practical skill.

In recent years, reading and literature teachers have moved closer together. In response to a changing student population and new societal demands, many reading professionals have extended their responsibilities to include college students. At the same time, many literature professionals have shifted their focus from a time-honored preoccupation with belles-lettres to a concern for language in general. Today, many reading teachers are attending to the reading of literature, and more literature teachers are interested in the various reading experiences of their students.

These shifts in professional focus were not the only reasons why the objectives were combined. The consultants who created these objectives[1] felt that a number of "literary" terms such as metaphor, image, symbol, rhythm and tone can be used to describe elements in nonliterary as well as literary texts, whether they be advertisements, magazine articles or textbooks. Even if one could identify features that seem unique to literary texts – rhyme, for instance, or plot – it is not necessarily true that the skills engaged by such features are different in significant ways from those that are employed in reading a

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[1] See Appendix B for a complete list of consultants who participated in all phases of development.

nonliterary text. The ability to link cause and effect, to predict consequences or to perceive incongruity, for instance, are skills that are used in reading articles as well as stories. It seems more appropriate, then, to focus attention in these objectives on the skills of the readers than on the kind of text being read.

The objectives for the 1979–80 assessment are categorized into four major areas: (1) Values Reading and Literature, (2) Comprehends Written Works, (3) Responds to Written Works and (4) Applies Study Skills in Reading. The objectives in these areas have been changed somewhat from previous objectives in reading and literature, as well as merged. The changes are most evident in the area of comprehension.

The comprehension objective deals with understanding the important meanings of written materials. Researchers and educators are still uncertain about how individuals derive meaning from the printed word. However, most agree that the process goes beyond the simple decoding of print into a message. It appears that it is a much more interactive process in which the reader brings his or her other knowledge and experience to bear in the reading task. This is evident, for example, in the various interpretations that different readers may derive from the same material. It is also seen in the activity of "reading between the lines." It seems clear, therefore, that meaning is not in the print alone.

The comprehension objective reflects this view of reading by focusing on the understanding of the important meanings that may be derived from written works; these meanings are described in terms of propositions. A proposition is created through the interaction of the reader and the printed material. To understand propositions, the reader must recognize the relationships between the concepts or ideas that can be derived from the printed material and use these relationships in conjunction with his or her own background, knowledge and experience.

The major objective concerned with response to written works differs from the comprehension objective in that the term "comprehension," in the latter, is limited to the largely unconscious activity of understanding primary meaning in the process of reading. Conscious, deliberate, overt attempts to extend understanding after something has been read – for example, analysis or interpretation of a poem, class discussion, critical essays, etc. – are defined as response to written works. In the definition of the response objective is the implicit suggestion that a highly desirable consequence of reading is action. Much that has been written is intended not only to increase understanding but to provoke deliberate responses.

The remaining two major objectives – Values Reading and Literature, Applies Study Skills in Reading – have not changed much from objectives of previous assessments.

In this booklet, the valuing objective is listed before the comprehension objective. Some people might feel that the valuing objective should follow comprehension on the grounds that one cannot value something one does not comprehend. Others might argue that valuing must begin before reading. Listing the valuing objective first in this set of objectives does not imply that it precedes comprehension. As long as one realizes that a certain amount of valuing motivates reading and a certain amount follows understanding, it makes little difference where the objective is placed. The same argument might be made for study skills, some of which are necessary for assessing meaning, some of which serve to enrich meaning and some of which are simply practical tools. All of the objectives interact with one another; they only appear sequential and autonomous when they are described linearly, as they are here.

The objectives are not defined in terms of age appropriateness. It is assumed that each objective and subobjective represents a continuum of difficulty. As students gain knowledge and experience, the complexity of the tasks that they are expected to perform increases.

A discussion of the objectives follows. Major objectives and subobjectives are presented as statements, followed by an amplified description.[2] Following each subobjective are a few italicized questions illustrating the kinds of questions one might ask or the kinds of skills one might expect students to display. They do not represent assessment items and they do not constitute a definitive list of possible questions. They are merely suggestive.

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[2]See Appendix A for a condensed outline of the objectives.

## OBJECTIVE I

## VALUES READING AND LITERATURE

Because the process of acquiring or internalizing reading values is an important outcome of reading instruction, a major goal of this assessment is to determine how many young people value reading, for what reasons they value reading and how fully they have internalized these values.

At the lowest level of internalization, readers are passive, marginally aware that a positive value might be associated with reading. They may see it as potentially desirable only when other activities available to them appear less rewarding.

At higher levels, readers demonstrate their beliefs that reading is valuable by actively seeking opportunities to read or write. They withdraw books from the library; they buy books; they volunteer to tutor other students in reading.

### A. Values the Benefits of Reading for the Individual

Students should learn that people, including themselves, stand to benefit from knowing how to read and from reading increasingly challenging works. The benefits include enjoyment, self-understanding and increased knowledge.

#### 1. Recognizes that reading can be a source of enjoyment; demonstrates a commitment to reading for enjoyment

Enjoyment can be a strong, long-lasting source of reading motivation. Accordingly, students must at least be aware that many people find enjoyment in a wide variety of literary and expository reading materials.

Beyond simply recognizing that reading may provide enjoyment, students should initiate reading activities because of the pleasure they bring.

*Do students feel that some reading might be personally enjoyable?*

*Do students identify reading, among other activities, as a source of enjoyment?*

*Do students spend time reading for enjoyment? What do they read? How often?*

2. **Recognizes that written materials can contribute to personal growth; demonstrates a commitment to reading as one means of developing self-understanding**

Active readers constantly encounter individuals or situations in their reading that allow them to clarify their views about themselves. The experience of reading, of interacting intimately with historical or fictional personalities helps one to develop a personal sense of justice and to recognize ranges for choice. Students should be aware that reading can be a pathway to self- understanding.

Students who reveal even higher levels of valuing choose to try to explore dimensions of their own character in works of fiction, biography and the like.

*Do students think they might learn about themselves and others through reading?*

*Do students read for their own personal growth?*

3. **Recognizes that reading can be a means of acquiring knowledge and solving problems; demonstrates a commitment to reading as a means of acquiring knowledge and solving problems**

The current abundance of "how to" books dramatizes the importance of written materials for acquiring knowledge and solving problems. Throughout the school years, students will have to read textbook materials to acquire knowledge and to fulfill education goals. After schooling, regardless of what path they choose, reading will still provide them with useful knowledge. Students therefore need to be aware that reading materials constitute an extensive resource for information.

As students progress in their reading abilities and their school careers, the value of reading as a source of knowledge should become increasingly salient.

*Do students think that reading might be a valuable source of information?*

*Do students read to gain knowledge and solve problems?*

**B. Appreciates the Cultural Role of Written Discourse as a Way of Transmitting, Sustaining and Changing the Values of a Society**

As students come to value reading for what it can do for them personally, they should begin to appreciate the critical role written materials play in gradually changing society's values, while simultaneously preserving cultural identity and continuity. Words can profoundly affect individuals; and individuals, independently and collectively, change societies, whether for the better or for the worse.

Students should recognize and appreciate the interaction of social forces and written works. They should also understand the social consequences of the curtailment or manipulation of reading materials.

As students grow older, they should gain an increasing sense of the value of written works to a society. Not only should students come to believe that written works and society affect each other, but they should guard that interaction against various forms of censorship.

*Do students recognize that written materials and society influence each other?*

*Do students support the written expression of different viewpoints?*

## OBJECTIVE II

## COMPREHENDS WRITTEN WORKS

The second objective, Comprehends Written Works, is the core of the reading and literature objectives; yet, these skills are difficult to define and measure. All of the other responses to written works – valuing, interpreting, evaluating, studying – depend upon a reader's initial ability to discover primary meaning in a text. One way of describing units of meaning is in terms of propositions. Propositions have been variously defined by researchers. In these assessment objectives, a proposition is defined as a unitary statement about the relationships among concepts or ideas. A proposition includes a topic and comment, an argument and a predicate. A proposition can define either a state ("The dog is big.") or an event ("The dog barked.").

A proposition typically takes the form of a clause or sentence. However, it should be kept in mind that words, clauses and sentences do not, in themselves, represent complete meaning. It is the reader's interaction with printed material that creates meaning. In some cases the meaning is clearly indicated by the text; it is explicit. In other cases the meaning is not; it is implied.

The comprehension objective is divided into three subobjectives: (1) comprehending words and lexical relationships, (2) comprehending propositional relationships and (3) comprehending textual relationships. This taxonomy of objectives is not meant to represent a hierarchy of subskills nor the sequence by which comprehension is achieved or is learned. Rather, it is a useful way of organizing the questions in this assessment so that they address important aspects of comprehension of a wide variety of text types.

### A. Comprehends Words and Lexical Relationships

In written works a proposition is represented by words linked together in a clause or sentence. The key to comprehending a proposition is understanding the meaning of words and understanding lexical relationships – the structural relationships among the words. These two elements are the focus of the first subdivision of the comprehension objective.

Comprehending the meaning of words requires understanding the context in which they are used. The dictionary readily shows that words have

many meanings. In some cases, often in literary language, words are used idiomatically or in unusual or poetic ways. Comprehending word meanings involves understanding a full range of meanings from normal dictionary meanings to unusual meanings, all derived from the context of the written materials.

Another aspect of understanding a proposition is comprehending the lexical relationships among the words that make up that proposition. It involves, in part, understanding the relationships of the actor, the action, the action's recipient, and so forth. These aspects of structure are typically called case relationships. It also involves understanding the structural relationships that result from anaphora — the use of a word to stand for or refer to other words. The most common of these is the relationship between a pronoun and the noun it represents.

*Can students understand the meanings of words when used in the context of written material?*

*Can students understand figurative and idiomatic meanings of words?*

*Can students understand case relationships such as actor, action and recipient?*

*Can students understand anaphoric relationships between words and their referents?*

**B. Comprehends Propositional Relationships**

In text, propositions are most often linked together to express relationships between states or events. One of the most common is a causal relationship — for example, "The car would not run because no one remembered to fill the tank with gas." Other types of propositional relationships include temporality (one event happens after another event), instrumentality (one event serves as a means for accomplishing another event) and comparisons and contrasts (the similarities or differences between events or states). This is a representative, but not exhaustive, list of types of relationships.

In written material, relationships among propositions are sometimes clearly stated ("John went home crying because Jim hit him.") and are other times implied ("Jim hit John. John went home crying."). Often a propositional relationship is expressed by two adjacent propositions; however, the relationship may be established by more than two propositions. The relationships may be established within a single paragraph or across several paragraphs. For the purpose of this subobjective, propositional relation-

ships are limited to understanding the stated or implied relationships between two or more propositions within a single paragraph. Understanding relationships that are established over more extended discourse is reserved for the third subobjective, comprehending textual relationships.

*Can students understand propositional relationships – such as causality, temporality and instrumentality – that are clearly stated in a paragraph?*

*Can students understand propositional relationships – such as causality, temporality and instrumentality – that are implied in a paragraph?*

**C. Comprehends Textual Relationships**

The major difference between comprehending propositional and textual relationships is the amount of text that a reader is required to process. Textual relationships are established across paragraphs and sometimes across an entire text; for example, statements about a person in a story may be provided in several episodes that together suggest the character of the person. Similarly, information about a particular topic may be developed in several paragraphs to form a main idea. Textual relationships may deal with meanings that are dervied from reading an entire book. For the purposes of this assessment, these relationships are restricted to those established across more than one paragraph of a passage.

In written material, textual relationships are rarely explicitly stated. A poem might not directly state its meaning; a newspaper editorial might not clearly state its purpose. These meanings are derived by inferring the relationships among propositions. Included in comprehending textual relationships are many aspects of understanding usually associated with literary works, such as character, mood, theme and interpretations of meaning. Other types of textual relationships are more often associated with expository texts, such as main idea and purpose. Many types of explanatory relationships (such as generalizations, implications, predictions) are prevalent in both literary and expository texts. The questions following are suggestive and by no means bound to text type.

*Can students infer the main idea or purpose of a text?*

*Can students understand the character, mood, theme or meaning in a text?*

*Can students understand various explanations for states or events?*

## OBJECTIVE III

## RESPONDS TO WRITTEN WORKS IN INTERPRETIVE AND EVALUATIVE WAYS

Having comprehended written works, readers can reflect upon them and respond in ways that will both deepen understanding and integrate the works into a framework of knowledge and values. All of us do a certain amount of subliminal interpreting and evaluating in the very act of comprehending. This objective, however, addresses *deliberate, conscious* kinds of interpretation and evaluation — for instance, the sort that a student must often do in class discussion or that a serious reader must do to fully understand and absorb the broadest implications of written works.

There are several major ways to deepen understanding of a written work. Readers can use their awareness of a work's emotional impact upon them as important information about its purpose and quality. They can also use their personal experience to better understand particular ideas, characters or situations. Readers can compare any written work to other works or examine it in the light of information from such fields as history, science or philosophy. They can analyze written works in terms of their structure or their employment of aesthetic conventions. These ways of deepening understanding are not mutually exclusive; some or all may happen at the same time.

Evaluation, the end product of a full reading and the activity that determines what one will do as a consequence of reading something, often follows interpretation. Having comprehended a work and having interpreted its many levels of meaning, fluent readers will often place it in a larger framework of values. To do so, they must develop criteria for evaluation and a capacity to apply these criteria to a range of reading experiences.

### A. Extends Understanding of Written Works Through Interpretation

Fluent readers should acquire practical skills for deepening their understanding of what they have read. Skills in responding to written works are often associated with the act of interpretating literature, but they can be applied to nonliterary works as well. For instance, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bible have been analyzed and interpreted in many different ways, each of which has expanded the range

of its potential meanings. Serious scholarship in all fields often requires close analysis and reinterpretation of texts in the light of new knowledge or different perspectives.

1. **Demonstrates awareness of emotional impact of written works**

   Reading is both an intellectual and an affective activity. A great many works are intended to entertain, persuade or illustrate through appeals to the emotions. Thus, an important goal of reading and literature instruction is that students become aware of their feelings, become confident about expressing them and become capable of using them to extend their understanding of what they read. By articulating their feelings through discussion or writing, they can become more involved with historical or literary characters, events and ideas. Increased involvement often leads to deepened understanding of both the work and oneself.

   *Do students experience emotion in responses to written works intended to be funny, sad, provocative, and so on?*

   *Can students relate their emotions to the purpose and meaning of a written work?*

2. **Applies personal experience to written works**

   Competent readers relate their personal experience to what they read, both in the process of reading (it is an inescapable precondition of understanding) and after finishing the written work. The latter activity often helps readers understand a character, idea or situation more fully than they did when they first read the work and were more or less under the writer's spell. After putting the book aside, readers may reflect upon their own experience with a similar character or idea. The process often leads to a more critical or more appreciative opinion of a work.

   *Do students recognize relationships between their own experience and something they read?*

   *Can students effectively apply personal experiences to what they read in order to deepen their understanding?*

3. **Applies knowledge of other works or other fields of study**

   No written work exists in a vacuum. Competent readers will often compare something they are reading with something they have read

in order to better understand it. Sometimes this means relating two books by the same author, one of which clarifies matter skipped over in the first. Sometimes it might mean looking at a number of selections — love sonnets, for instance — in order to more fully appreciate one of them. Often, full understanding of a written work will entail reading other works to which it alludes or upon which it is based. Full understanding of a Shakespearean comedy may well require some reading about life in Elizabethan England.

*Can students relate what they read to other works?*

*Can students relate knowledge of other fields of study, such as history, science or philosophy, to what they read?*

**4. Analyzes written works**

By analyzing texts in class discussions and papers, students learn about the richness of language and the craftsmanship of writing; they come to understand that a work can have many layers of meaning beyond the literal. They should learn how to return to a text and attend to special aspects, such as the stylistic conventions employed, the formal structure or areas of multiple meaning. Students also need to learn to re-read to attend to complex or ambiguous sections of a text.

*Can students identify the formal structure of a work and see how that structure contributes to the meaning of the work?*

*Can students identify literary devices and see how these devices contribute to the meaning of the work?*

**B. Evaluates Written Works**

A certain amount of evaluating always takes place before choosing to read and while reading to determine whether to continue. This objective, however, addresses the deliberate evaluation of works readers have both comprehended and interpreted.

Instruction in reading and literature should not lead all students to a single scale of values by which to judge quality in written works. Rather, it should lead each student to develop his or her own scale of values, enable each student to apply that scale to a wide variety of materials and reading situations and assist each student to recognize the importance of other points of view. Evaluative criteria such as interest, relevance, clarity, imagi-

nativeness, adherence to form and social importance should emerge naturally from a wide reading experience.

Although all readers possess unconscious criteria for judging what they read, it is important that readers be able to articulate their criteria. Competent readers often change criteria for different types of reading, since they expect different experiences from popular novels, technical journals or newspapers.

Having articulated flexible criteria for the judgment of various texts, readers should apply them to what they read. Some of this application will take place automatically, but some of it will require training. At its most advanced stage, this amounts to learning how to be a responsible critic – capable of analyzing a work, interpreting it on its own terms and relating it to the human condition.

*What criteria do students use to evaluate poems and stories?*

*Can students apply appropriate criteria to evaluate a broad range of written works?*

## OBJECTIVE IV

## APPLIES STUDY SKILLS IN READING

Good readers employ a variety of approaches for gathering and comprehending information from printed materials. For example, they are able to use reference materials efficiently and are able to adjust their reading rate to suit the purpose for which they are reading. The subobjectives within this section are especially useful for students who are embarking on their own study efforts, and for this reason are classified as study skills. The use of these skills does, of course, transcend the school setting. The study skills mentioned below are all considered important, but they should not be considered definitive.

### A. Obtains Information From Nonprose Reading Facilitators

Visual aids can be a valuable supplement to written text, aiding in its comprehension by adding information and illustrating ideas. Among the visual aids that students encounter are graphs, maps, charts, tables and diagrams.

Good readers interpret information provided in these forms of nonprose formats and use this information to aid comprehension.

*Do students use visual aids when reading?*

*Can students correctly interpret information given on a chart, map or graph?*

### B. Uses the Various Parts of a Book

Knowledge about the organizational features of a book assists the student in search of needed information within the book. Students should be familiar with the types of information provided in various parts of books, such as title page, preface, table of contents, footnotes, index, bibliography, glossary and appendix. Furthermore, a student should be able to find specific information through using various parts of a book.

*Do students use different parts of a book to find information?*

*Can students use the different parts of a book to find specific information?*

**C. Obtains Information From Materials Commonly Found in Libraries or Resource Centers**

A great many reference tools for widening both reading and understanding are available in school and community libraries. Examples of these include dictionaries, encyclopedias, library card catalogs, abstracts, bibliographies, directories, periodicals and indexes. A student should know the function of various reference materials and how to use them.

*Do students use various reference materials?*

*Can students find specific information from reference materials?*

**D. Uses Various Study Techniques**

There are various techniques that students may use to increase their understanding and retention of materials they are studying. These include such things as outlining, notetaking and using headings, introductions and summaries.

In addition, students need to adjust their reading speed to meet their specific purpose. For instance, they may have to read a textbook assignment slowly for details, skim a story for an overall impression or scan an article to locate specific information.

*Do students use various techniques to aid their studying?*

*Can students adjust their reading rates depending on their purpose for reading?*

## APPENDIX A

## OUTLINE OF READING AND LITERATURE OBJECTIVES

**I. Values reading and literature**

A. Values the benefits of reading for the individual

1. Recognizes that reading can be a source of enjoyment; demonstrates a commitment to reading for enjoyment

2. Recognizes that written materials can contribute to a personal growth; demonstrates a commitment to reading as one means of developing self-understanding

3. Recognizes that reading can be a means of acquiring knowledge and solving problems; demonstrates a commitment to reading as a means of acquiring knowledge and solving problems

B. Appreciates the cultural role of written discourse as a way of transmitting, sustaining and changing the values of a society

**II. Comprehends written works**

A. Comprehends words and lexical relationships

B. Comprehends propositional relationships

C. Comprehends textual relationships

**III. Responds to written works in interpretive and evaluative ways**

A. Extends understanding of written works through interpretation

1. Demonstrates awareness of emotional impact of written works

2. Applies personal experience to written works

3. Applies knowledge of other works or other fields of study

4. Analyzes written works

B. Evaluates written works

**IV. Applies study skills in reading**

A. Obtains information from nonprose reading facilitators

B. Uses the various parts of a book

C. Obtains information from materials commonly found in libraries or resource centers

D. Uses various study techniques

## APPENDIX B

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Lora Lingle (high school student), Denver, Colo.
Walter Loban, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, Calif.
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Eddie Lucero, Kit Carson Elementary School, Albuquerque, N.M.
Henry Maloney, Seaholm High School, Birmingham, Mich.
Andrea Mason, Talent Search, Boston, Mass.
Julie Massey, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Marion McGuire, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I.
Sharon Menard, Awareness Association, Lafayette, Colo.
Margo Mijares (high school student), Denver, Colo.
Mary Miller, National Urban League, Inc., Los Angeles, Calif.
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James Sabol, Bellevue Public Schools, Bellevue, Wash.
Ralph Salas (parent), Albuquerque, N.M.
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Gilbert Schiffman, National Right-to-Read Program, Washington, D.C.
Robert Schreiner, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn.
Nancy Scott, University of Colorado at Denver, Denver, Colo.
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